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SUBJECT: EBADI URGES WEST NOT TO LET UP ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
MESSAGE WITH IRAN

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Classified By: Minister Counselor for Political Affairs Jeffrey Rathke  
for reasons 1.4(b)/(d)

11. (U) This message is being transmitted on behalf of  
CONGEN Duesseldorf.

12. (C/NF) Summary: In multiple public meetings 26-28  
February in North Rhine Westphalia, Nobel Peace Prize  
laureate Shirin Ebadi (strictly protect throughout) kept to a  
human rights theme, criticizing the Iranian government for  
abusing women and Bahais and applying the death penalty to  
minors, yet she avoided direct attacks on top leaders. She  
drew attention to the plight of the Gonabadi Sufis and to  
Aliyeh Eghdamdoust, a women's rights activist recently  
sentenced to three years in prison. Privately she also  
declined to comment on USG Iran policy, telling CG that she  
had said all she had to say on that score during a January  
visit to Washington. She expressed no confidence that  
Iranian politics would change after the June elections, even  
if Ahmadinejad were defeated, as the president has few  
powers. Change could not be forced on the country, she  
declared, but only could come from within, perhaps led by  
women and youth who were the strongest supporters of  
democracy, and urged patience. While she left audiences  
guessing her views on larger policy questions, she urged  
western governments not to let up on their human rights  
message with the Iranian government. End Summary.

A Human Rights Message

13. (C/NF) In multiple public and private meetings 26-28  
February in Duesseldorf, Moenchengladbach, and Bochum, Nobel  
Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi stayed on her human rights  
message, criticizing the Iranian government for abusing the  
rights of women and Bahais in particular and for applying the  
death penalty to minors, 80 of whom been executed in 2009  
alone. She reviewed for her audiences the prevalence of  
stoning and other human rights abuses, and described her  
human rights activities more generally. After stops in Spain  
and Norway, she was accompanied on her Germany leg by her  
youngest daughter, an aspiring human rights lawyer, who has  
been an intern at the International Criminal Court in The  
Hague for several months, and an interpreter.

14. (C/NF) Ebadi drew particular attention to the Gonabadi  
Sufis, 40 of whom were recently arrested "for no reason" and  
the destruction of a Sufi mosque in Isfahan in late February.  
In a February 27 conversation in Bochum with CG, she  
mentioned the case of Aliyeh Eghdamdoust, a women's rights  
activist and client of hers, who in January was sentenced to  
three years in prison and whose plight was not widely known.  
She expected the trial of the seven Bahai Council members to  
take place in April, although it might be postponed. There  
are good judges in Iran, she observed, but there would be no

fair trial, as the regime would ensure that only the most pliable judges would hear this case, and that no observers would be allowed to witness it.

#### Avoiding Confrontation with Regime

¶5. (C/NF) In her public appearances, Ebadi avoided direct attacks on the Iranian leadership on many issues of international interest and controversy, commenting for example in Duesseldorf that "the regime must stop its uranium enrichment program voluntarily and cannot build a wall around the country." She told another audience that Iranians did not understand Ahmadinejad's denial of the Holocaust, attributing it to "one politician's personal characteristics." She offered little in response to public and private questions seeking ideas of how western governments might achieve better results in their Iran policy.

¶6. (C/NF) Ebadi expressed little confidence that Iranian politics would change following the June elections, even if Ahmadinejad lost, because the office of the president has few powers. Moreover, candidates who utter even the slightest criticism would not be allowed to run. Change could only come from inside, she stated, not from without, and she expressed considerable confidence in women and youth, suggesting that it was more likely that they would bring democratic change to Iran, but that patience was needed. She knew of no special events in Iran in connection with International Women's Day.

#### Comment

¶7. (C/NF) Ebadi was appreciative of USG support for her situation and human rights in Iran in general. Her message,

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however, was first and foremost on human rights, as she updated numerous audiences on the current situation but left them guessing her views on such larger questions of pressure vs. engagement, sequencing of actions, and strategy. Her only advice: western governments should not let up on their human rights message with the Iranian government.

Koenig